

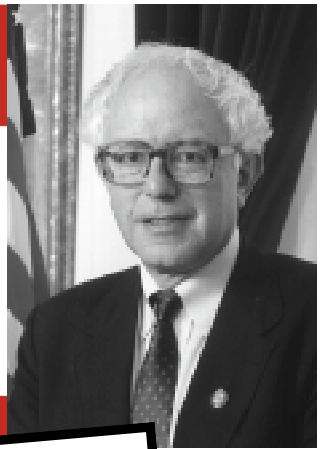


U.S. Representative

Bernie Sanders

*Focus on Senior Citizens' Issues*

Summer 1999



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

*Dear Vermont Senior,*

The purpose of this newsletter is to keep you informed about issues of importance to senior citizens. I also hope that you will accept my invitation to attend one of the Senior Citizen Town Meetings that I am holding in various locations around the state. There is a great deal of important activity currently taking place in Congress regarding seniors' issues, and these meetings will give you an opportunity to get your questions and concerns answered.

As I go around the state of Vermont, one of the major problems that seniors inform me about is the high cost of prescription drugs. Unfortunately, Medicare does not cover prescription drugs, and many seniors are paying a very significant percentage of their limited incomes for the medicine their doctors are prescribing. Last month, I took five Vermont women who are battling breast cancer to Montreal, Canada. We discovered that the same exact drugs that they are purchasing in Vermont, manufactured by American companies, are sold for a fraction of the price in Canada. In the case of one drug used for breast cancer treatment, Tamoxifen, the price in the United States was over ten times higher than in Canada. This is wrong. At a time when the pharmaceutical industry is enjoying record-breaking profits, Americans should not have to pay the highest prices in the world for medicine. I have introduced a number of pieces of legislation to lower the cost of prescription drugs.

As you may know, it is anticipated that the United States government will have a huge budgetary surplus in coming years. I believe strongly that this surplus should be used primarily to extend and improve Social Security and Medicare, and to make certain that our veterans get the health care benefits that they were promised. I recently voted against a proposal brought forth by the Republican leadership which would use much of the surplus to provide huge tax breaks to the wealthiest people in this country. It makes no sense to me to provide tax breaks to millionaires, and then tell the elderly, the sick and our veterans that we don't have the resources to help them.

Let me conclude by mentioning that my office has a number of caseworkers who do an excellent job of helping Vermonters who have problems with Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, veterans' needs and nutrition – among many other areas. If you or anyone you know is having a problem, please do not hesitate to give our office a ring. ***Our toll-free number is (800) 339-9834, or you can write to us at One Church Street, Second Floor, Burlington, Vermont 05401.***

***I look forward to seeing you at one of our upcoming Town Meetings on Seniors' Issues – August 10 in Winooski, August 11 in Rutland, August 12 in Newport, and August 13 in Bennington.***

Sincerely yours,

*Bernie*  
Bernard Sanders  
U.S. Congressman

# We Must Lower the Cost of Prescription Drugs

On July 7, I went to Montreal, Canada, with a group of Vermont women who are battling breast cancer in order to purchase prescription drugs. The trip pointed out the huge disparity in prescription drug prices between the two countries. Tamoxifen, a commonly used breast cancer drug which sells for \$12.80 (US\$) in Canada, costs \$156 in the United States – over ten times as much. Many of the other drugs that the women needed also sold for far lower prices in Canada.

In fact, we in the United States pay far more for prescription drugs than the consumers of any other country on earth. A recent international study showed that if senior citizens in the United States paid one dollar for a prescription drug, that same drug sold in Germany for 71 cents, Sweden for 68 cents, the United Kingdom for 65 cents, Canada for 64 cents, France for 57 cents and Italy for 51 cents. Ironically, most of these drugs are manufactured in the United States by American-owned companies.

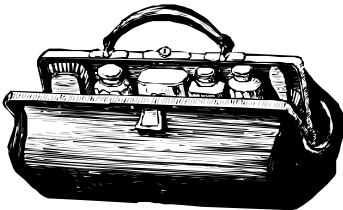
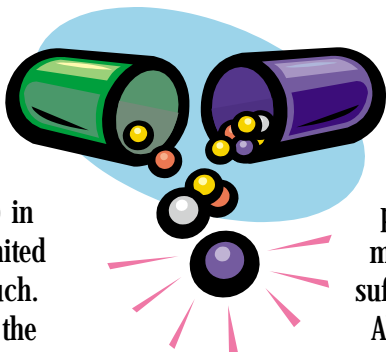
While millions of Americans are unable to afford the cost of prescription drugs, the pharmaceutical industry is enjoying record-breaking profits. Last year, the ten largest pharmaceutical companies in America saw average profits of \$2.5 billion, a 26-percent increase from the previous year.

The pharmaceutical industry will give you a wide range of explanations as to why American consumers pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs. I will give you another reason. The pharmaceutical industry spends more money on lobbying and campaign contributions than any other industry in the country. In the

first 18 months of the last election cycle they spent over \$82 million on political activity. Of the 535 members of Congress, 420 of them have received contributions from the drug industry, as

have both major political parties. The result: when the pharmaceutical industry talks, politicians listen – and millions of Americans suffer the consequences. Along with other

members of Congress, I have introduced a number of pieces of legislation which will lower the cost of prescription drugs in this country. There is no rational reason why exactly the same drug should be sold in Canada and in other countries for a fraction of the price that it is sold in the United States. The time is now for Congress and the American people to demand fundamental changes in the pricing policies of the pharmaceutical industry.



## Veterans Entitled to Prescription Drug Discounts

It has come to my attention that some veterans are not aware that federal law entitles them to purchase prescription drugs at significantly reduced prices.

Each 30-day or less supply of medication for non-service connected prescriptions costs only \$2.00. Veterans receiving medication for treatment of a service-connected condition, veterans rated 50 percent or more service-connected, and veterans receiving VA pensions or whose income is at or below the maximum VA pension rate are exempt from co-payments for medications.

If you have not taken advantage of this VA benefit, please call my office for more information at (800) 339-9834 or (802) 862-0697.

### PRESCRIPTION DRUG COST COMPARISON

Drug	VT Average	U.S. Average	Canadian Cost (US\$)	Cost Difference VT vs. Canada	Cost Difference U.S. vs. Canada
Tamoxifen 10mg – 60 pills	\$105.35	\$156.42	\$12.80	723%	1122%
Synthroid .05mg – 100 pills	28.88	22.68	8.14	255%	179%
Amitriptyline 25mg – 30 pills	6.93	5.70	4.24	63%	34%
Zocor 20mg – 100 pills	391.22	366.27	191.45	104%	91%
Relafen 500mg – 100 pills	132.50	115.45	63.61	108%	81%
Relafen 750mg – 100 pills	156.22	136.35	83.50	87%	63%
Methylprednisolone 4mg – 30 pills	20.12	16.13	12.22	65%	32%
Coumadin 1mg – 100 pills	69.80	56.52	30.72	127%	84%

# News You Should Know

## Senior Nutrition Programs

If you can believe it, one of the major health risks to senior citizens is malnutrition. All over this country, doctors report that malnutrition is responsible for many health complications for senior citizens, often resulting in extended hospital stays. In the richest country in the world, this is inexcusable.

I am proud to report that the House of Representatives recently passed a \$10 million amendment that I offered which provides additional funding for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) – a federal nutrition program which provides food packages to low-income seniors, pregnant women and children. Studies indicate that for every \$1 spent on senior nutrition programs, \$3 are saved in federal Medicare, Medicaid and Veterans' health care costs, since malnourished patients stay

in the hospital nearly twice as long as well-nourished seniors.

Vermont has recently applied to participate in the CSFP program. Based on discussions with the USDA, the expectation is that if the Senate supports this amendment in the conference committee, Vermont will soon be able to enter this program and provide valuable food assistance to some of our most vulnerable citizens. No senior in America should go hungry. This is a step forward.



## Are You Eligible for the Food Stamp Program?

Many seniors in Vermont are eligible for the food stamp program but don't take advantage of it. One of the reasons for that is some seniors mistakenly believe that in order to apply for the program they have to fill out forms in a welfare office, and

then use food stamp coupons when they purchase food in the grocery store. This is no longer the case.

***Seniors should understand that they do not receive food stamps or coupons when they are in the program. Instead, they receive a cash benefit deposited directly into their bank accounts. If there is no bank account available, the electronic benefit transfer program will create an account and issue a card for clients to access their cash benefits at an ATM or at the grocery store.***

***Further, there is no longer a requirement for seniors to visit an office in order to apply for the program. Seniors can now waive the in-office interview by calling the Department of Social Welfare office to request an interview either at home or over the phone.***

If you, or someone you know, is having difficulty affording food, please give my office a ring for more information on how to apply for the food stamp program. If you need help with the program, call my office or your local Area Agency on Aging (1-800-642-5119).

## Medicare Reform

There are a number of proposals being considered for Medicare. Some of them are very positive, and will improve and expand health care for the senior citizens of this country. Other proposals, if adopted, will be disastrous.

I have helped lead the effort in the Congress against such terrible ideas as raising the eligibility age for Medicare from 65 to 67; imposing a 10 percent co-payment fee on home health care and voucherizing the program. I also believe that, instead of giving huge tax breaks to the wealthiest people in this country, we should accept the President's proposal to use 15 percent of the surplus to extend Medicare by 15 years – keeping this vitally important program solvent until 2027.



At a time when over one-third of our seniors lack any prescription drug coverage, and others are paying much too high prices for their medications, I am pleased that the President heeded the call of a number of us in Congress to add a prescription drug benefit to Medicare. After years of talking about the issue, I am glad that we are finally taking action to cover these life-saving drugs for our seniors and individuals with disabilities so that they will no longer be forced to

choose between paying for food or for the drugs their doctors prescribe.

One of the important parts of Medicare is home health care, which serves homebound patients and helps them keep a sense of independence by allowing them to stay at home, rather than being institutionalized. This vital service helps 22,000 Vermonters every year. Unfortunately, Vermont's home health care agencies have been struggling ever since Congress cut \$48 billion from home health care as part of the unfair "balanced budget act" of 1997.

In order to undo the damage done by the massive Medicare cuts of 1997, I have introduced H.R. 2361, the Medicare Home Health Care Restoration Act. This legislation repeals the interim payment system which has severely cut Medicare reimbursements to home health agencies, and repeals both the temporary and permanent, 15-percent across-the-board cuts which have wrecked havoc with home health care agencies in Vermont and across the country. Home health care under Medicare is a program which protects some of the oldest and most frail people in the country. We cannot turn our backs on them.



Rep. Bernie Sanders  
1 Church Street, Second Floor  
Burlington, VT 05401-4417

Telephone: 802-862-0697  
Toll-free: 800-339-9834  
www.house.gov/bernie

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
  
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*If you receive more than one copy of this newsletter, we apologize. Please feel free to pass the extra copy along to an interested friend.*

*This mailing was prepared, published, and mailed at taxpayer expense.*

**Come Join Congressman Sanders at One of these Congressional Town Meetings on Seniors' Issues**

*Bernie will be joined by state and local experts on seniors' issue at these meetings.*

<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Aug. 10</b>	<b>1:00 pm</b>	Winooski Senior Center 123 Barlow St.	Winooski
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Aug. 11</b>	<b>1:00 pm</b>	Gilbert Godnick Senior Center 1 Deer St.	Rutland
<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Aug. 12</b>	<b>1:00 pm</b>	Gateway Center	Newport
<b>Friday</b>	<b>Aug. 13</b>	<b>1:00 pm</b>	Bennington Senior Center 124 Pleasant St.	Bennington

*For more information, call (800) 339-9834.*

**Important Telephone Numbers For Vermont Seniors**

Vermont Senior Helpline .....	(800) 642-5119
Vermont Department of Social Welfare Hotline .....	(800) 287-0589
<i>(For information on food stamps, heating assistance and other programs)</i>	
Social Security .....	(800) 772-1213
Veterans Centers .....	(802) 862-1806
	or (802) 295-2908
Veterans Benefits Helpline .....	(800) 827-1000
Internal Revenue Service .....	(800) 829-4477
Vermont Consumer Assistance Helpline .....	(800) 649-2424